

George H. Corliss House
45 Prospect Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-229

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
14-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-229

GEORGE H. CORLISS HOUSE

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Address: 45 Prospect Street, Providence, Providence County,
Rhode Island. Plat 12, lot 154.

Present Owner: Brown University with a life tenancy for Charles
W. Brackett of Hollywood, California.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Brief Statement This is a large brick house, the home of George
of Significance: H. Corliss, a prominent Providence industrialist.

PART I
HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

1854 Property was taxed to the City of Providence
(School House)

1868 City of Providence sells for \$34,984 to Abby W
Watson wife of Robert W Watson and forever quit claim to her a cer-
tain lot of land bounded: N by Angell Street 160'; E by lot #21
and Matthew Watson 116'; S by Prospect Alley 160'; W by Prospect
Street 116'...comprising lots 17, 18, 19, 20 on plat of part of the
Estate of Nathan and Rufus Waterman (Plat Book #2 page 3) being the
same 4 lots purchased by the City as Follows:

1841 Lot #17 by deed from Rufus Waterman. - Deed Book
79, page 224, in Providence City Hall.

1841 Lot #18 by deed from Richard Carrique, tr to
Abigail Whipple. - Deed Book 77, page 347, in Providence City Hall.

1841 Lot #19 by deed from Richard Waterman. - Deed
Book 79, page 225, in Providence City Hall.

1851 Lot #20 by deed from Sally Thompson. - Deed Book
122, page 233, in Providence City Hall.

The four lots containing 18,785 square feet. -
Deed Book 179, page 458, in Providence City Hall.

1873 Robert W and Abby W Watson his wife sell to
George H Corliss a certain lot of land comprising lots #17, 18, 19,
20 on a plat of part of the Estate of the heirs of Nathan and Rufus
Waterman being the same conveyed to Abby W Watson by the City of

Providence in 1868. - Deed Book 240, page 327, in Providence City Hall.

1883 George Corliss listed here for the first time.- Providence Directory.

1929 Taxed to Charles W Brackett, grandson of George H. Corliss.

1952 Property taxed to Charles W. Brackett and Brown University

1954 Taxed to Brown University

2. Date of erection: Between 1873 and 1883.

3. Architect: George H. Corliss is supposed to have designed the house

4. Sources of information: John Hutchins Cady, The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island: The Book Shop, 1957), p. 140.

Anita F. Glass, Early Victorian Domestic Architecture on College Hill (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Art, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1960).

B. Historical Events Connected with Structure: The following material on George H. Corliss was compiled by Margaret Fletcher for the Providence Preservation Society, March 1962:

"Born June 2, 1817 in Easton, Washington County, New York. His father was a physician and was able to give his son a common school education such as the times afforded, and then send him to the academy at Castleton, Vermont. His first employment was that of school teacher, later going into trade. He found his lifework in the improvement of the steam engine. He came to Providence about 1844. Here he projected and built the Corliss Steam Engine Company.

"The Corliss Steam Engine supplied the motive power for the machinery on exhibition at the Centennial Exposition where it was seen by many people.

"Mr. Corliss was awarded the Rumford Medal in 1870 by the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston. He received the highest prize at the Paris Exposition in 1867 and the grand diploma of honor at the Vienna Exposition of 1873. The Providence Plantations for Two Hundred and Fifty Year by Welcome Arnold Green (Providence: J. A. AND R.A. Reed, 1886).

"He married twice--first Phebe F. Frost of Canterbury, Connecticut in January 1839. They had two children Maria Louisa and George Frost Corliss. She died in Providence, Rhode Island, March 5, 1859. In December 1866 he married Emily A. Shaw of Newburyport, Massachusetts. The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island (Providence: National Biographical Publishing Co., 1881), page 409]

"George H. Corliss died February 22, 1888. Rhode Island Historical Society Scrapbook #2, page 185, at the Society in Providence, Rhode Island."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a large, elegant brick house, three stories high with a four-story corner tower. Though unused, the house is completely furnished, mostly with furniture contemporary with the house including many pieces by Belter.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: About 57' square main block facing west, three stories high with slightly projecting four-story tower at northwest corner, three-bay front with center bay slightly recessed, semioctagonal bay on south side, two-story rear wing to east.

2. Foundations: Regular coursed ashlar brownstone.

3. Wall construction: Brick, 3-1/4" x 8-1/4", running bond, smooth hard face, 3/16" mortar Joints, mortar colored black.

4. Porches: One-story brownstone entrance porch, paired Roman Doric columns at front corners, single pilaster responds, full entablature with modillion cornice and balustrade.

5. Chimneys: Tall brick chimneys in north, east and south walls, stepped faces, brick dentils below brownstone caps.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance has brownstone doorway, elliptical head, molded architraves with deeply relieved foliated and figured carving in the spandrels. Double wood doors, top halves lighted, paneled below.

b. Windows: Double hung windows, single light sash; molded brownstone window frames, sharp profiles, deep projection, sills on brackets, cornices on first two floors, segmental heads on

third floor, fourth floor of corner tower has paired windows opening to brownstone balconies.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hip roofs, sheet metal covering with standing seams.
- b. Cornice: Molded cornice, modillions, denticulated bed mold. Balustrade around upper roof deck.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Central-hall plan with four principal rooms on each floor of main block, parlor at northwest, music room at northeast, library at southwest, dining room at southeast with curved bay, kitchen originally in rear wing. Bedrooms with adjoining dressing rooms and baths on upper floors. Small study on fourth floor in northwest corner tower. Central hall 10' wide, first floor ceiling 11'-8" high.

2. Stairways: Open well main stair at rear of central hall, U-shape with landings, closed string with paneled outside stringer and paneled soffits, turned and carved balusters, scrolled handrail, large detail.

3. Flooring: Patterned hardwood floors in some rooms. Other rooms carpeted, some original carpets.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paneled walnut wainscot in hall and some rooms; plaster walls, some painted with richly colored and patterned designs.

5. Doors: Paneled walnut doors, sunk panels with complex moldings. Pilaster trim, paneled jambs.

6. Trim: Walnut. Window trim similar to doors. Molded plaster ceiling cornices, becoming very elaborate in principal rooms with modillions, frets, and egg and dart bands.

7. Hardware: Brass. Mortise locks with patterned brass knobs, large butt hinges with patterned surfaces.

8. Lighting: Many original gas fixtures and chandeliers in place, converted to electricity.

9. Heating: Central hot air. Fireplaces in all principal rooms, one-story wood or marble mantels, richly membered with carved panels and bands of ornament.

D. Site

1. General Setting and orientation: Faces west at south-east corner of Angell and Prospect Streets, house set back from sidewalks on north and west, lot elevated above the sidewalk and slopes up toward the house emphasizing the verticality of the house.

2. Enclosures: Ashlar granite retaining walls on north and east.

3. Walks: Main entrance on west approached by flight of 12 granite steps opening in the retaining wall, plus six steps in the entrance porch.

4. Landscaping: Lawns, trees and shrubs around the house. Uncontrolled growth of ivy on north and west sides of the house.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
May 1962.